

The Big One – Chapter 1 – Early Warnings

Palmdale, California sits on the San Andreas Fault. On Highway 14 on the south side of Palmdale you drive across the fault, which is raised up at the point. The freeway is actually cut through the fault and you can see the layers of rock pointing towards the peak of the hill they cut through. It is an awesome, though scary, sight.

Over the course of the past 22 years that Gary Olsen and his family had lived in California, they had experienced their share of earthquakes. Gary rarely noticed them unless they started to really shake the house. The Whittier Narrows quake had shaken their condo in Panorama City big time. Gary was sitting in the basement in his drawers working on a computer program when it hit. Everything he had stacked on top of his monitor ended up in his lap.

His wife Sharon was just stepping into the shower when the shaking began; she literally had one foot in and one foot out of the shower. Gary had rushed from the basement to the second floor, thrown on some jeans and shoes and went to check on the kids. Lorrie was thrown out of bed and was just getting up off the floor. Amy was sleeping soundly.

They assembled in the living room a few minutes later as a big aftershock hit. The chandelier over the dining room table swayed and they had to sit down to avoid falling down. There was a lot of discussion that day as to whether or not this was *the big one*. It wasn't, registering in the 6 range of the Richter scale. They moved to Palmdale in 1987 and the next big quake they experienced was the Northridge quake of 1994. Those mirrored closet doors really rattled when that one hit.

The next Earthquake Fair Gary loaded up on MRE's, 12-hour candles, and kerosene for their lamps, an extra Coleman stove and several cans of Coleman fuel. He even installed an earthquake alarm in the house. It would go off when you bumped into the wall, but it never once went off in an earthquake. He turned it off. The MRE's got old and Gary disposed of them without replacing them.

His new idea of food was a 25-pound bag of Pinto beans, 25- pound bag of rice and two months worth of the commonly used food items on the shelf. Gary went through a mid-life crisis in the late 1990's and he and Sharon divorced. Apparently, his survivalist attitude had rubbed off on Sharon; she had an earthquake gas valve installed. The bimpos Gary was chasing after soon tired of him and he them. In 1999, Gary and Sharon got back together and eventually remarried.

In October of 1991, or was it 1992, Gary met a fella named Ron Green. They had a common problem and Ron and Gary became fast friends. However, in 1996 when Gary decided to act the fool, they had parted company briefly, Gary having told his pal Ron to bug off. It was during this same period that Gary met and became friends with another fella with a similar problem to his and Ron's, Clarence Rawlings. The three men became fast friends and except for the period when Gary was off doing his thing, the friendship deepened.

Ron's idea of being a survivalist was to buy another handgun and a couple of boxes of ammo. He couldn't buy the popular calibers, opting for oddball things like the .38-40 and other cartridges that were hard to find and expensive. In 2004, Ron's bought a membership at the gun range down the Angeles Forest Highway and Gary and he went frequently to shoot.

Gary finally unloaded his white elephant HP 9000 printer for \$5,000, barely 50 cents on the dollar. He used the money to buy himself a M1A, a Ruger Mini-14, a .357 magnum S & W revolver, a Winchester 9422 rifle and a Remington 870 home defense shotgun. Being a natural born survivalist, Gary loaded up on ammo for the weapons, buying a lot of the Aussie surplus 7.62x51mm NATO, US overproduction 7.62x45mm NATO, .357 magnum 158 grain SJSP and SJHP, several bricks of .22LR and a case each of 3" 15-pellet 00 Buck and 3" Brenneke Black Magic 1³/₈oz Slugs.

Clarence wasn't into firearms to the extent that Ron and Gary were. He had a .38 S & W revolver and a 12-gauge shotgun. Neither was he into storing up a lot of food. Since he had retired, the money wasn't as available as before. Then, he had the heart attack and the stroke. He was healing slowly from where they'd taken the vein from his leg and didn't get out much anymore. Except for the trips to the range once a week, Gary didn't get out much anymore either.

Gary had started a map years before, marking the epicenter of major earthquakes on it. An Englishman he once knew insisted that the quakes moved together and the big one would fall halfway between the last two large quakes. Gary faithfully recorded each earthquake on the map, but the Englishman's claims didn't seem to hold water. Gary didn't realize that there was a flaw in his thinking; he only recorded the California earthquakes, ignoring the large quakes occurring around the eastern side of the Pacific Rim. The USGS was expecting a quake somewhere up in the Big Valley and had even drilled a well for sensors. That quake was also overdue.

It was late July in Palmdale and it was hot and getting hotter. Gary and Ron left early that day to beat the heat at the range, arriving at the range around 9 am. The range was one of those 100-yard affairs and both men shot their center fire rifles. Ron did better than Gary because his rifles were all equipped with scopes.

Gary hadn't spent the money on scopes for either of his rifles; it had all gone for ammunition. Still, Gary put all of his shots on target and most in the black. Rifles weren't really his things anyway. Put that .357 Magnum revolver in his hand and he could shoot rings around Ronald. But iron sights against scopes were never an even match, especially at 100-yards.

On the way to the range that day, Gary had grabbed a cold six-pack of 16 oz. bottles of water and a couple of Snickers Almond candy bars, just in case his blood sugar dropped. They had finished shooting and were in the car headed back home when the earthquake hit. Ron fishtailed a bit and brought the car to a stop waiting for the shaking

to stop.

“Man partner, this is a pretty good quake,” Ron remarked, “I’ll bet that it is in the 6 range at least.”

“I think you’re right Ronald McDonald,” Gary acknowledged, “And here we are out in the middle of nowhere.”

“It’s not that far back to Palmdale,” Ron assured Gary, “We’ll be home in 15 minutes.”

“If you say so,” Gary replied.

They resumed their drive back home and just before where the Angeles Forest Highway butts into the Sierra Highway, ran into a landslide that had the road blocked. That last stretch of road was a downhill grade along the side of a large hill/very small mountain. Ron and Gary got out and surveyed the situation. The road was completely blocked, the car wasn’t going anywhere. They weren’t that far from home, maybe 5 miles or so, and they decided to leave a note on the car and hoof it the 5 miles home. They loaded up their guns, the water and the candy bars and headed home.

Now picture, if you can, two men in their 60’s loaded down with enough armaments to fight WW II hiking along the Pearblossom Highway. They tried thumbing a ride, but the occasional passerby just gave them a strange look and sped up a little to get away from the two gun nuts.

It was getting hotter and the men were getting hot and tired. They paused from time to time to drink another bottle of water and drain off the previous bottle. It hadn’t taken them long to get to where Sierra Highway turned off into Palmdale, that was all downhill.

But, to get to the next intersection, Barrel Springs Road and Pearblossom Highway, they had to climb a steep hill. When they got to the top of the hill, they were near the Aqueduct and both were tempted to climb into the water to cool off. Only common sense and the fast moving water kept them from doing so.

Not long after they’d begun their 5-mile walk, another temblor had struck and by golly, it seemed as if this shake was bigger than the first. They couldn’t be sure of course, they had been in the car when the first one hit. They had one more hill to descend and one more to ascend and it would be downhill or flat the rest of the way home.

After they’d rested, each rest period was a little longer than the previous; they started down the hill to the Barrel Springs stop light. When they had started out from the car, they were visiting quite a bit. Mostly it was Ron grumbling about this and that and Gary worrying that everything was ok back at the house. Along the way, their energy waned and the men now walked in silence. By the time they’d gotten down the hill and back to the top of the next, Gary had had to stop and eat one of the candy bars. The walking had burned off too much of his blood sugar.

They could almost see their homes from where they stopped. It didn't appear to them that Palmdale had received much damage, even though the second quake had seemed to be larger than the first. They ate their candy bars and when Gary got over the shakes caused by his low blood sugar, trudged the mile to the corner of 40th street east and Pearblossom Highway. They walked north on 40th street east to Avenue S and continued to Avenue R-8. They parted company at R-8, Ron headed east to his home and Gary continued north on 40th street east. When he cleared the last houses on 40th, Gary started off cross-country to save him some distance and within the hour had finally arrived home. Ronald had made it to 47th Street east and beyond and was within ½ mile of their home.

The quake had tripped the gas shutoff valve next to the house and neither Gary nor Sharon knew how to reset the valve. She had called the gas company and they would be by sometime during the afternoon to turn the gas back on. Ron had finally made it home and he called Gary to let him know he was ok. Ron said he had some chest pains, but he was used to them, he'd take a nitro tablet , Excedrin and be ok in a bit.

Sharon told Gary that the TV was reporting that both quakes had an epicenter somewhere in the greater Palmdale area and that the first was a 6.1 and the second was a 6.4. Lucy Jones had been on TV assuring everyone that the likelihood that these were foreshocks of a bigger quake was less than 5%. The Caltech, Pasadena, folks were being bombarded with reporters questions, each a poorly reworded version of the previous and Gary turned off the TV in disgust.

They talked about it and Gary persuaded Sharon that they should run over to Sam's Club and stock up on bottled water. He'd had a bologna sandwich and was feeling better except that his feet were killing him. They got in the car and drove over to the Sam's Club. It appeared as if half of Palmdale had had the same idea, they couldn't even get near to the store.

Sharon filled up the gas tank at Sam's Club, it was the cheapest gas in Palmdale and they drove over to the old Wal-Mart store just a mile away. They had better luck here and were able to buy 6 cases of 1-pint Aquafina bottled water. Gary told Sharon to head for the new Wal-Mart at 47th and S; he wanted a lot more than 6 cases of water.

It wouldn't go to waste, he told her, and they drank a case or two a month anyway. When they got to the new Wal-Mart, there were a lot of cars in the parking lot. They went inside and found that they were limited to a purchase of 6 cases of the Aquafina. They got the water and headed home. They were still unloading the water when a third shock hit Palmdale, seemingly a little bigger than the two previous shocks.

They hurried to finish unloading the water into the garage and turned on the TV. The third shock was also 6.4 and Lucy Jones was having trouble getting the reporters to believe that the 3 quakes were not a precursor of a bigger quake. The gas company either

hadn't shown up while they were gone or the third temblor had tripped the valve again, they still had no gas.

Sharon suggested that Gary get a kettle of water heating on their gas grill so that he could take a sponge bath. He had worked up a powerful stink on the walk home from the car. He hated to waste the gas and opted, instead, to take a cold shower. That water was COLD. Cleaned up and smelling a little better, he suggested that they try getting some more water at Costco. That brought on a strong protest from Sharon; why hadn't he said something while they were at Sam's Club; they weren't that far from Costco at the time?

Gary snapped something but she didn't catch it. She knew better than to ask him to repeat it. Gary could be a real Crusty Old Curmudgeon at times. They drove over to Costco and braved long lines. However, they came away with a 7kw generator, 12 cases of water, lots of ground beef, 100-pounds of flour, 25-pounds of sugar, three 6-pound cans of Crisco, Folgers, assorted other items and another 50-pounds each of pinto beans and rice.

Sharon positively hated pinto beans, so she persuaded Gary to stop at Smart & Final Iris to get some Great Northern or Small White Beans, anything but more pinto beans. While they were at Smart & Final, Gary got three 10-pound bags of the Great Northern beans, and more meat. Their car heavily laden, they headed back to the house to get the meat broken down and in the freezer. With that out of the way, Gary got Sharon to drive him to Pep Boys where he bought 10 5-gallon gas cans. They filled the cans at the Chevron on the corner and returned home.

Gary stored the 50-gallons of gas on the patio, filled the tank on the generator and started it up to make sure it ran ok. It was fine and as near as he could tell, they were set. They had food, water, and a generator with plenty of spare gas. Gary called Ron and asked Ron if Linda and he had made runs to the store for food and water. They hadn't and Ron fairly insisted that they didn't need to. Gary told Ronald to get off his dead butt and get some water, at least. If they didn't drink it, Gary would buy it from them. Ron relented and said that they would go to Costco and pick up some water and extra food supplies.

Gary got on the phone and called Clarence. He asked how Clarence was doing and if they'd had any damage from the earthquakes. They were fine Clarence assured him. His leg was healing nicely now and he was finally able to get out and around. Gary asked if they'd gone to the store for water and such, these quakes could just be a precursor, after all.

They had been to Wal-Mart and to Stater Brothers Clarence assured him and they were just fine. Gary suggested that if the big one hit and they needed a place to come, that they were more than welcome. Be sure to bring your food, water and guns, Gary told his friend. Clarence pushed aside any suggestion that they would ever have to leave home, but told Gary thanks, he'd keep that in mind.

Gary glued himself in front of the TV. As was typical when a sizable quake hit southern California, regular programming was preempted while the announcers reported and re-reported and re-re-reported the news about the quakes. Gary switched from channel to channel, listening to CBS, NBC and then ABC. When he'd made the rounds, he started over. Usually by that time, they had come up with a new version of the story and at least he wasn't being bored to tears.

There hadn't been any more temblors since the third quake. Nevertheless, Gary filled the kerosene lamps and placed them outside on the patio. He put new batteries in all of their flashlights, too; it was better to be safe than sorry. As Gary and Sharon sat there watching the TV, she made a comment that the food wouldn't do them one heck of a lot of good being piled in the garage. If the big one did hit, the garage was sure to collapse and bury the food and water.

Gary decided that Sharon had a point and he got his two-wheeler and hauled all of the water and food to the middle of the back yard. He remembered to turn off the sprinklers; wet food wouldn't do them a bit of good. He stayed up well past midnight making sure that everything was somewhere free of any possible falling debris. Totally exhausted, he finally got to bed around 1 am.

The Big One – Chapter 2 – Earthquake

It had cooled off enough that Gary and Sharon had opened up the house before they went to bed. Ron and Linda had left everything they purchased in the car and Ron had the good sense to put his firearms collection in the trunk of his car. Every once in a while Gary got something right and rather than take a chance, Linda and he had put the food they normally kept in their pantry in her car.

“Man, that Gary is a worry wart,” Ron thought as he hauled the food to Linda’s car. “Then again, his hometown, Charles City, was hit by the worst Tornado in the history of Iowa on May 15, 1968. Same track, different train.”

It was well past midnight before they got to bed, too. Their home and Gary and Sharon’s home were built in the late 1980’s and were supposed to be ‘earthquake’ proof. That was all relative, if a big enough earthquake hit, nothing could withstand it. Look at what had happened in Alaska in 1964; some streets had shifted 20’ or more. A few quotes from the US Department of Commerce report listed in the references will give some of the key facts:

"March 27: 17:36:14.2. Epicenter 61.0 north, 147.8 west, southern Alaska, depth about 33 km, ... Magnitude 8.5, [Note: since this description was published, the magnitude has been revised to 9.2.]

"... Maximum intensity IX-X. Felt over approximately 7,000,000 square miles of Alaska, and portions of western Yukon Territory and B.C., Canada. This was one of the most violent earthquakes ever recorded and was accompanied by vertical displacement over an area of 170,000-200,000 square miles. The major area of uplift trended northeast from southern Kodiak Island to Prince William Sound, and east-west to the east of the sound. ...

"This earthquake generated a seismic sea wave (tsunami) that devastated towns along the Gulf of Alaska and left serious damage at Alberni and Port Alberni, Canada, along the west coast of the United States, and in Hawaii.

"Only the sparse population and time of occurrence when schools were closed, business areas un-crowded, and tides low prevented the death toll from surpassing 131. (Civil Defense estimates included 122 deaths from the tsunami and 9 from the earthquake.) Total damage from the earthquake and tsunami was between \$400 and \$500 million."

Ron remembered the details as he drifted off to sleep.

At 5:13 am, the entire city of Palmdale, in fact all of southern California, was shaken awake by a tremendous jolt that went on and on and on. It would later be established that the shaking had lasted 6 minutes and 27 seconds. It would also be established that the quake registered 9.4 on the Richter scale.

The epicenter of the quake was just down the road from Palmdale in the Littlerock area. The ground was hit by a hard shock followed by a rolling motion that just wouldn't give up. Gary heard Missy bark sharply, waking him from his deep sleep. She then alternated between barking and whining and Gary knew something was up.

He had no more sat up in bed than the quake hit. The mirrored closet doors rattled sharply and the dresser next to his bed threatened to tip over on the bed. Gary grabbed his pants and shoes and rode the bed like a bucking bronco. Sharon had worn her clothes to bed that night. Ever since the auto accident in 1988, Sharon had trouble sleeping in a bed. As a consequence, she slept in the recliner in the living room. She managed to get out of the chair, albeit with great difficulty, and into the archway of the front door which was just 6' from her chair.

Back in the bedroom, the closet doors lost their purchase on the hangers and came crashing to the floor. Missy managed to jump on the bed with Gary and their six cats all scampered under the bed. Though it literally seemed to go on forever, the quake eventually ground to a halt.

Gary looked around and saw that the house was still standing, barely. He could look through the walls into their back yard. Sharon bolted out of the front door the moment the shaking subsided. The streetlight directly across the street from their home lay in the street, shattered. She looked around and discovered that some of the two-story homes had collapsed. She looked back at their home and decided that it would collapse at any moment.

Gary had pulled on his pants and slipped into his shoes. The screen door of the patio door in their bedroom had popped out and the roof of their patio cover had fallen. Not from the posts, but it had detached itself from the house and fell in an arc. He grabbed Missy and headed for the door. The cats must have felt they were perfectly safe under the bed because they stayed right where they were.

Gary called to Sharon and she answered him from the front yard. It looked like the house could collapse at any moment. A mile away at Ron and Linda's, the earthquake had hit while Ron was up relieving himself. It threw him to the floor and Linda out of bed. Their dogs had started to bark and whine too just moments before the quake began.

Ron was certain that their home was going to collapse with them inside. A two story home, he thought, was much more likely to fall than a single story home like Gary and Sharon's. Their house managed to hold together through the shock, but he could see that it, too, was in tough shape. They hurriedly dressed, grabbed their cats and dogs and made a hasty exit to the front yard. Kevin and John were already in the front yard by the time they got outside.

Clarence and Lucy slept on the main floor of their two-story home. They had left the water and non-perishable food in his car, but had not emptied the pantry as had Gary and

Ron. They exited the house in the middle of the shaking, barely making it out before their home folded up in a pile of broken timber, wires and what could only be described as junk. Two miles closer to the fault than Gary, Clarence and Lucy's home was one of many that collapsed in the first shock. Gary had said bring the guns and Clarence had put them in his trunk. Clarence pulled the spare clothing out of their car and they dressed right there on their front lawn.

The fences between Gary and Sharon's backyard and both of their neighbors had fallen. Sharon made her way around the house and into the backyard. She called to the cats and they eventually came out from under the bed like balls from a cannon. Gary was visibly shaking and when she looked at her hands, she was too. Missy lay on the ground whining.

The roof extension on the southeast corner of the house hadn't fallen and Gary rushed into the kitchen to grab his insulin from the refrigerator and their boxes of meds from the kitchen table. He had no more made it back to the back yard when the first aftershock hit, throwing them both to the ground. The house shuddered and collapsed and the patio cover was shaken off the posts and fell to the ground. They huddled there in the backyard while the aftershock continued. It seemed like an eternity, but the aftershock only lasted about 15 seconds.

Over at Ron and Linda's the aftershock flattened their home like a steamroller had hit it. They, too, were thrown to the ground, as were Clarence and Lucy at their home 1½ miles away. When the aftershock, later determined to be 7.1 on the Richter scale subsided, Gary walked over, picked up two lawn chairs and sat down. He had prepared all of his life for this moment; he had never thought it would come. Gary was in a state of mild shock at he sat looking at their collapsed home.

The quake had rolled across southern California and had caused great damage in the northern San Fernando Valley. The freeway overpasses that had collapsed in the 1971 Sylmar quake and again in the 1994 Northridge quake didn't disappoint, they collapsed yet a third time. Many of the new homes built along 14 in the Santa Clarita area had suffered extensive but not fatal damage. It was certain that no one would be heading to Palmdale, as had always been Gary's greatest fear, to escape the earthquake.

Gary and Sharon were still sitting in their backyard when Clarence and Lucy pulled in.

"Gary, I'd hoped that your home had made it though," Clarence said greeting his friend.

"Made it through the first shock, but the aftershock pulled it down," Gary replied emotionless.

"Ours went right in the middle of the first shock," Clarence offered, "How do you suppose Ron and Linda made out?"

"Why don't you ask him yourself?" Gary said pointing to the two cars pulling up in front

of their rubble.

“Howdy partner,” Ron greeted Clarence. “I see that your house didn’t fare any better than ours,” he said to Gary.

Gary just shook his head. He was trying hard not to cry, but the tears must not have gotten the message, they streamed down his face. In a few minutes, Gary composed himself and the three friends and their wives compared notes. All three had lost their homes. Both Ron and Clarence had bailed out when they smelled gas.

There wasn’t any smell of gas here at Gary’s; Sharon’s gas shutoff valve had operated as advertised. They had more than enough food and plenty of drinking water. Surely, it wouldn’t take those FEMA folks long to get to Palmdale.

They rescued the gas grill and the extra bottle of propane from next to the house. That part was easy. The garage had collapsed just as Sharon had foreseen, but the freezer had survived and wasn’t under any rubble, just surrounded by rubble. They pulled the rubble away and fought the freezer to the backyard. Gary started up the generator and ran it for a while to cool the freezer back down. It was a whole lot harder to get the dinged up refrigerator out of where the kitchen had once stood, but they managed. They also pulled out some pots and pans.

Gary’s shed was filled with a mixture of survival/camping gear and odds and ends including their plate collection. The plates were carefully packed in boxes from when they had stored them. They emptied the shed and set the boxes on the south side of the shed.

They recovered the 4’ folding table from next to the house and set up the two Coleman stoves. The two Coleman lanterns were hanging from nails driven into the rafters of the shed and aside from broken mantles, were serviceable. The clamp on extra bottoms held plenty of mantles. During the afternoon, a Deputy Sheriff came down the street. The Deputy got out, took all of their names and left. He warned them that some looting had already broken out in Palmdale although he couldn’t imagine what would be in good enough condition to be worth taking.

That bit of news got Gary to moving big time. He pulled the 20 20-round magazines out for his M1A, the 11 30-round magazines for the Mini-14 and proceeded to load them. He stuck a magazine in the Mini-14, stuffed the 9 extra mags into the pouches on a set of web gear and handed it to Sharon. She gave him a strange look and put on the web gear.

He cycled the action on the Mini-14 and reminded her of how the safety worked. She stared at him like he was crazy. Maybe he was and maybe he wasn’t. He had a determined look in his eye. Gary then loaded the mags for his M1A and put 12 of them in some oversized magazine pouches on a second set of web gear. Each pouch held 3 20-round M-14 mags. He shoved a mag in the M1A, cycled the action and loaded the

870 with 00 buckshot.

Ron and Clarence got the not-too-subtle hint and loaded their weapons. Poor looters wouldn't stand a chance. It was starting to get hot. Gary pulled 8 steaks out of the freezer and retrieved the bag of badly mauled potatoes from the kitchen. The steaks began to thaw and Gary suggested that they have steak and Patti potatoes for supper.

Chris and Patti and their two boys had made it out of their house ok. They were camping out on the front lawn and Patti came down to visit with Sharon. Their house had survived the initial shock and large aftershock. Each subsequent aftershock seemed to be smaller and it was still standing. Patti had been shopping with Sharon for years and some of that survivalist mentality must have rubbed off. They were ok for food at the moment and Chris had their garage refrigerator out on the driveway and was powering it with his truck mounted 5kw generator.

Gary had his boom box out and was tuned to an LA station. From what little he could tell, Palmdale may have taken the worst of the earthquake, it was hard to tell. Several bridges along the 14 had collapsed and there was no way to get to Palmdale from that direction. Soledad Canyon road, the alternate road that Chris always drove to and from work in Hollywood was completely closed off by several landslides.

The only way that help was going to get to Palmdale was from the north and east. They replaced the mantles in the Coleman gas lamps, managed to retrieve the box containing the five kerosene lamps and paper wrapped chimneys from Gary where had placed them. They fired up the gas grill and cooked the potatoes in foil and when they were done, cooked the steaks. They set up Gary and Sharon's 10'x14' tent for the Green's and Rawlings to share and Gary inflated air mattresses for Sharon and him. They would sleep in the shed. Although they'd not seen any looters, the men all agreed to take a 2-hour shift to keep watch through the night.

Twice that night they were hit by aftershocks. The wreckage of the house just groaned and settled a little more with each shaking session. The aftershocks were in the 5.0 to 6.0 ranges, becoming smaller with the passage of time. The LA radio station began to report the death toll from the LA area, but they had no word out of Palmdale.

It wasn't until late morning, over 24-hours after the big one hit, that the California National Guard made it to Palmdale. It was after noon before the first Humvee drove into the Moon Shadows housing tract. It slowly drove down Stardust Place and turned on Moonraker Road. Seeing Gary standing there with his M1A and wearing web gear must have startled the Staff Sergeant on the passenger side, the vehicle pulled to a stop and the SSgt. got out.

"I'm afraid you can't have that rifle, mister," the SSgt. said.

Gary slipped his finger into the trigger guard and pushed the safety off. "I'm on my own property guarding what's left of everything we own Staff Sergeant," Gary said, the men-

ace in his voice plain enough, "What do you mean I can't have my United States Rifle, 7.62 mm, M14?"

Gary's movement did not go unnoticed either by the SSgt. or by his driver who slipped out of the Humvee and slipped his Beretta out of its holster.

"Palmdale is under martial law," the SSgt. said, "You won't be needing that rifle."

"Do you intend to post a guard on my home or on this housing tract?" Gary asked.

"No Sir," the SSgt. replied, "We don't have enough men for that."

"Fine. Then I'll just keep the rifle Sergeant," Gary retorted. "Someone has to protect my things."

"But Sir," the SSgt. started to protest.

"So I put the rifle down Sergeant," Gary said, "How long after you leave do you think it will take me to pick it back up? Post a guard and I'll put it up right now. Otherwise, I'm going to exercise my 2nd Amendment rights to keep and bear arms." Noticing the look on the Staff Sergeant's face, Gary went on. "How bad is it out there?"

"Pretty bad. I didn't catch your name," the SSgt. replied.

"Olsen. Gary Olsen," Gary responded.

"We need to get all of your names for the survivors list," the SSgt. said.

"Already gave them to an LA County Deputy Sheriff," Gary replied. "And he didn't tell me I couldn't have the rifle either, I might add."

"Mr. Olsen," the SSgt. said, "I'm just doing my job. How about giving me a break here?"

"Lighten up Gar-Bear," Ron suggested, "The soldier boy is just doing what he has to do."

"Bureaucrats," Gary remarked. He reset the safety on his rifle and went to sit in a chair. The SSgt. got everyone's name and pulled Ron aside.

"Tell your friend Olsen to be careful where he points that rifle of his," the SSgt. advised, "Someone might get the wrong idea."

"Any word when FEMA is going to get here?" Ron asked changing the subject.

"Some of them flew into Bakersfield and are driving down now," the SSgt. replied, "Some others flew into Ontario and are coming up via I-15 and 138. I don't expect you'll

see anything of them for a while.”

“You soldier boys got a kitchen set up or anything, or are you just going around giving people a hard time?” Ron asked.

“We’ll have a field kitchen set up tomorrow or the day after,” the SSgt. answered.

“So we’re on our own until then?” Ron summarized.

“I’m afraid so, Mr. Green was it?” the SSgt. said.

“Ron Green. You just trot along now soldier boy and come back when you have a kitchen set up,” Ron said. “We’re doing just fine, considering.”

The SSgt. returned to the Humvee. “Yeah, you’re just fine,” he thought, “Fouled-up, Insecure, Neurotic and Emotional.” The soldiers stopped at all the homes in the housing tract taking names for their list of survivors. Funny, they never even asked if anyone was hurt.

The Big One – Chapter 3 – Aftershocks

When you use the term aftershock in relation to an earthquake, most people probably think of the ground shaking some more. That's one form of aftershock to be sure, but the looting, the displaced people, all add up to TEOTWAWKI to the victims of the earthquake. They may have lost their home, possessions, and/or loved ones.

Earthquakes had become such an issue in California that insurance companies would no longer write earthquake insurance. Oh, they had been happy to take the premiums all right, but Loma Prieta on October 17, 1989 and Northridge on January 17, 1994 had seen the end of insurance companies writing earthquake coverage in California.

Ultimately the state of California had had to step in and provide earthquake insurance. The California Earthquake Authority is a privately funded, publicly managed organization that provides Californians the ability to protect themselves, their homes, and their loved ones from earthquake loss. Established in 1996, the policies were not exactly the best of coverage.

Coverage A - Dwelling

The amount of coverage the CEA provides for the structure is equal to the Coverage A amount of your homeowner's policy.

Coverage B - Extensions to Dwelling

Limited coverage for utility structures, ingress and egress, and retaining walls. The policy itself contains a complete list of what is covered under Extensions to Dwelling coverage.

Coverage C - Contents - \$5,000 limit.

Contents coverage provides up to \$5,000 to repair or replace items of personal property such as furniture and appliances. The policy itself contains a complete list of what is covered and what is excluded under Contents coverage.

Coverage D - Loss of Use - \$1,500 limit.

Loss of Use coverage provides up to \$1,500 for additional living expenses you might have if your house is uninhabitable after an earthquake.

Limited Building Code Upgrade - \$10,000 limit.

The policy includes limited Building Code Upgrade coverage up to \$10,000 for those additional costs of repair of your Coverage A damage that are attributable solely to complying with local residential building codes in effect on the date of the damaging earthquake.

Losses under Coverages A, B and C are subject to a deductible of 15% of your dwelling coverage amount (15% of "Coverage A"). Only Coverage A damage counts toward meeting the deductible.

Losses under Coverage D are not subject to a deductible.

The 15% deductible on a CEA homeowner's policy is determined by the amount of insurance on the structure alone, and only structural damage counts toward meeting the deductible. This means that, regardless of the magnitude of damage to your contents and personal property, unless a CEA insured has damage to the structure equaling at least 15% of its insured value, the CEA will not pay any claimed loss for structure or contents.

On the other hand, Loss of Use coverage is not subject to a deductible. Loss of Use provides up to \$1,500 for additional living expenses you might have if your house is uninhabitable after an earthquake.

IMPORTANT: Even though the deductible represents that part of your earthquake damage for which you are responsible, you are not required to spend any of your own money in order to receive and spend CEA funds.

It was a good thing their homes collapsed. Otherwise, their earthquake insurance would have been limited to \$1,500. Of course in this day and age, it cost a lot to just get a home painted, so most everyone with earthquake insurance had some coverage albeit insignificant.

A good example was Ron and Linda's home. They had their home insured for \$250,000. That meant that they had to eat the \$37,500 of replacement and all but \$5,000 of the cost of their furnishings. The \$1,500 was available only if you incurred the expense and the \$10,000 wouldn't even begin to cover Code Upgrades.

Ron conservatively figured that they were out about \$70,000 by the time it was all said and done. The story was the same for all three families; they all had coverage but they all had to come up with a lot of money. Gary and Sharon need about \$60,000, Clarence and Lucy about \$65,000. Considering that Gary and Sharon had only paid \$95,000 for their home new, they were really behind the 8-ball. Maybe this explained Gary's rather bad attitude; maybe Gary just didn't like the California National Guard. Who knew?

They continued to have aftershocks of the geological kind, too. With each shock, the rubble settled a little more. A Deputy Sheriff showed up the next day with a message from Lorrie and David. They were in Lancaster at Amy and Udell's home and were ok. That was a relief and Gary's mood seemed to lighten a bit.

Rather than antagonize the National Guard when they showed up with the same message later, he actually left his rifle in his chair and met them armed only with his .357 Magnum and First Blood, Rambo I knock-off knife. It was probably a good thing that his Rambo III knife was buried in the rubble; it was almost as big as a machete.

They ran the generator for one hour out of every three, keeping the contents of the refrigerator and freezer cold and/or frozen. The porta potty was the most unpopular item

of equipment that Gary had and Patti and Chris graciously allowed them to use their toilet provided they brought their own water to flush with.

They were draining Gary's hot water heater at an alarming rate and were most fortunate that it had not collapsed along with the home. Its 50-gallons of water wouldn't go far at the rate they were using it. They had to get some water so Gary and Ron got every container they could find that would hold water and headed to the Aqueduct. Gary and Sharon had a couple of dozen knocked down 1 ½ cubic foot book boxes in the shed and they taped the boxes back together and lined them with plastic bags. It was better than nothing. They tied a rope to a pail and slowly filled the boxes pulling water from the Aqueduct one pail full at a time. The Aqueduct had cracked upstream and the pool of water they found wouldn't last long in the heat.

What is life like 3 days after the big one? Well, there were the aftershocks. They just kept coming. There was living in the heat, something most of them hadn't done in a long time. There was the indignity of having to borrow your neighbor's bathroom and bring your own water. Well, at least they still had a bathroom. Well, sort of; after three days their toilet refused to drain anymore, apparently the sewer line was broken and wherever it was draining off to had filled.

That solved the water problem; with no toilet to use, they didn't need the water for anything but washing. They boiled the water on the camp stove and let it cool to a temperature they could use. They sure didn't want to get sick from contaminated dishware or pots and pans. For some reason the CNG hadn't gotten the kitchen set up either, or they had not bothered to tell them. They were just lucky that no one had anything more than scratches and bruises.

When the patio cover detached from the house, it knocked the two patio tables out onto the lawn. The plastic patio chairs had also survived the collapse and at least they had a couple of tables and chairs for everyone. It was just like an extended picnic. Not! People whose homes were still standing weren't any better off than they were. Many of the homes were structurally unsound and many people were just plain afraid to go inside for fear that another aftershock would come along and collapse their still standing home.

On the fourth day the CNG came by to tell them that FEMA and the CEA had arrived and set up shop in the parking lot of the old Fairgrounds in Lancaster. They talked it over and decided that the 3 men might as well go to Lancaster and get in line. It was the typical bureaucratic nightmare.

After standing in line for hours they learned that they needed all kinds of documents; documents that were still buried in the rubble of their homes. At least the CEA had laptop computers and could access records of their policies. Now, they just had to come up with some document that proved they lived where they used to live, like a utility bill; they too were buried in the rubble of their homes. It was a good thing that Gary had left his guns at home that day, by the time they were ready to leave he had murder on his mind.

They took the time on the way home to survey the damage at Ron and Linda's and Clarence and Lucy's. The homes were nothing but ashes. Apparently the leaking gas had been ignited by a spark and the entire neighborhoods had burned to the ground. They had seen the smoke and wondered. Now they knew. Gary just counted himself fortunate that Moon Shadows hadn't burned down too. Dick had rushed to the gas shutoff valve on Avenue R and had shut off all the gas to the tract. They were awful lucky to have an employee of the Gas Company living in the tract.

They drove around the tract when they got back. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to the houses that had collapsed. Some of the two story homes were still standing, though many were down. Some of the single-story homes also survived; did Gary and Sharon just have bad luck?

The men ate dinner and later decided that they would spend as long as it took to find Gary's records in the rubble. Ron and Clarence decided to try the water company in Palmdale and the Gas Company office in Lancaster. Surely someone must have some records that they could get to at least prove they lived where they had lived. It really was frustrating and the attitude of those bureaucrats hadn't helped much either. By the time they'd gotten their turn, the bureaucrats were hot and tired too and the heat must have drained their sympathy.

On the fifth day, they sorted through the rubble until they found Gary's lateral filing cabinet. Everything he needed was in that cabinet. It took tire irons and elbow grease, but they finally managed to get the cabinet open. They still had part of a day left so they drove to the Palmdale Water District office to find it closed. They drove to the Gas company office in Lancaster. It was closed, too but at least a sign in the door said the office would reopen on Monday so that people could pay their bills!

"Do you believe that crap?" Ron said. "They are going to reopen Monday so people can pay their bills. Jeez! I have half a mind to burn the place down."

"Don't do that Ron," Clarence warned, "If we can't get records from them, who knows what we'll do?"

Ron was still ranting when they arrived back at Gary's house. Gary wondered if he had been as bad as Ron was at the moment and asked Sharon. Her answer said it all. "Worse."

That put him in a snit again and all three of the men grumped the rest of the evening. This night the three old geezers were the three Grumpy Old Men. The sixth day they got up very early and were near the front of the line at the old Fairgrounds. Gary had all of the paperwork required and in the blink of an eye (5 hours) had his claims filed.

They went by the Water District office on the way home and it was still closed. It was Saturday; Monday would be the first week anniversary of the big one. Monday, they were going to the Gas Company not to pay a bill but to get the records. Gary couldn't

decide whether to take the MBR or the shotgun. Maybe he'd just take both.

On Sunday they rested. It had been a very long week and they were hot, tired and getting angrier by the moment. At least the CNG had quit coming around, but was that a good thing or a bad thing? Given the mood that the men were in, it was probably a good thing.

An earthquake was an act of God, so what could they say? On the other hand, the CNG and FEMA were agents of the State and Federal governments and they felt that they had a right to be angry. I mean really, if an earthquake knocked down your home and caused it to burn to the ground, where did the government expect you to get the papers they just had to see? Did everyone keep all of his or her paid bills in the lock box at the bank? Doubtful. And what was with the Water District and the Gas Company? Surely the female clerks at the Water District weren't out repairing broken water lines.

It was probably a good thing that the three men didn't drink. If they had gotten a snootful, they probably would have burnt down the Gas Company office. Instead, they drank their iced tea and sweltered in the heat. The date was Sunday, August 1, 2004. Monday, July 26, 2004 would be a day they would long remember. It turned out that Monday, August 2, 2004 would also be a day they would remember for a long time too. Not because they had any problems; rather because for the first time in 8 days someone finally treated them like a human being with feelings.

They got to the Gas Company office in Lancaster at 6am. They wanted to be the first in line. Others had the same idea and they had to settle for being 6th in line. Close enough. A lot of the other men waiting were also armed. They could understand this part. At 8 am the Gas Company opened their doors.

They had remained closed for the week after the earthquake to make sure they got their computer system back on line and a standby generator to run it. The employees knew exactly why they were there and within minutes the men walked out of the office with copies of their bills for the last year. They hurried over to the old Fairgrounds and got in line. Less than six hours later, both Ron and Clarence had completed all of their paperwork and the three men were headed home.

They thawed some steaks, their mood and appetites greatly improved. They didn't have any potatoes to go with the steaks, but they had a great steak and homemade bread, lovingly baked in the Coleman Oven. For the first time in a long time there was light at the end of the tunnel. Next came the waiting. Waiting for the paperwork to go wherever it had to go and waiting for the paperwork to be processed when it got wherever that was. But, at least they were in the queue.

Tuesday morning, Linda and Sharon presented Ron and Gary with a shopping list. They wanted potatoes, fresh bread and milk, and a host of other fresh vegetables and food. The men figured that most, if not all of the grocery stores in Palmdale were closed, they

didn't know for certain, and that this would require a trip to Lancaster, Mojave, Tehachapi, or even Bakersfield.

They had enough cash among them for the food and to refill the gas tank. The problem would be getting in and out of the area. The CNG had advised that they had cordoned off Palmdale to protect the community against *those who would take advantage of the situation*. The men put their rifles in the trunk of the car along with their web gear and their handguns in the glove box. They assumed that they wouldn't need them, but better safe...

They took 50th Street east to Avenue K and turned west towards Lancaster, the same way they had traveled to Lancaster just the day before. This time, however, they ran into a CNG roadblock that hadn't been on Avenue K the day before. The guardsmen turned them away, telling them that there had been a food riot at the large Albertson's on 20th Street east. Lancaster was closed to all but the residents for the moment.

The Big One – Chapter 4 – Improvements

“Can you believe that crap?” Ron roared as they pulled away from the CNG roadblock.

“I can,” Gary responded. “Typical bureaucratic BS. They set up the FEMA and CEA offices in a town and then close the town down because of a food riot. They’re going to have a lot more than food riots if they don’t reopen Lancaster soon.”

“Where are we going now partner?” Ron asked.

“Keep going until you get back to 50th Street east and then turn left,” Gary suggested. “We’ll go up to Avenue E and take it over to Sierra Highway. Take a right there and we’ll check out the Albertson’s in Rosamond.”

The Albertson’s in Rosamond was closed. A sign in the door said “Sorry-Out of Food”. They jumped on the 14 and headed north to Mojave. The Stater Brothers store there was open, but the shelves were nearly bare. The store had nothing on the list Linda and Sharon had given them. Next stop Tehachapi.

Both stores in Tehachapi had been picked over pretty good and they found few of the items they were looking for. Next stop Bakersfield. Gary had it in mind that they should go to Bakersfield all along. Maybe they could find a sporting goods store or a RV store open and he could buy a chemical toilet, or even two.

They found the food they needed at the first grocery store they came to. An inquiry at the gas station while they filled up with the only fuel available, premium at \$2.599 a gallon, led them to a sporting goods store that stocked the chemical toilets. Gary’s ATM card worked and he bought two and 144 rolls of biodegradable tissue. The weary travelers headed back to Palmdale. They followed the same route home and as they passed to the east of Lancaster they noticed smoke rising from Lancaster.

“Dollars to donuts that roadblock started a riot,” Gary observed.

“No bet partner,” Ron replied.

Clarence just said, “My, my,” and shook his head.

The Palmdale roadblock was on 50th Street east at Avenue P-8. They pulled up to the roadblock and stopped. The CNG soldier told them that Palmdale was closed. They told him they lived in Palmdale and had just had to go all the way to Bakersfield to get supplies. The three men even produced their drivers’ licenses/id card to prove it. Still the guard questioned them. Gary had just reached for the glove box and started to open it when the SSgt. from several days before walked up.

“What in the hell is going on here Sergeant?” Ron roared.

“Sorry Mr. Green, was it, we’ve had a lot of people trying to get into Palmdale to scavenge,” the SSgt. replied.

“What’s with all the smoke in Lancaster?” Gary asked.

“Mr. Olsen, we had to shut down the town briefly to regain control after a food riot,” the SSgt. explained.

“We know. They wouldn’t let us into Lancaster this morning,” Gary replied. “That was foolish to shut down the community where the FEMA and CEA folks were located. Bet that started a riot, huh?”

“Yes Sir, it did,” the SSgt. replied. “Tell me something if you can. Is the whole Antelope Valley populated by gun nuts?”

“At one time Sergeant,” Gary explained, “There were more militia type groups in the Antelope Valley than in any other part of the state of California.”

“I thought they all went away when the population explosion started back in the mid-1980’s,” the SSgt. pondered.

“More likely just went underground,” Gary said.

“Let these men through,” the SSgt. told the soldiers. They removed the barriers and the three men returned to Moon Shadows.

“Where have you been?” Linda asked sharply when they pulled in.

“Bakersfield and all points in between,” Ron laughed. “But we got the food and Gar-Bear even found a couple of chemical toilets.”

Supper that evening was macaroni and cheese with some browned hamburger and boiled peas stirred in. Gary rather liked the combo, but Ron and Clarence gave it the evil eye. At least there was fresh, homemade bread to go with the fare. Ron and Clarence polished off a whole loaf by themselves. They draped some black plastic around a frame thrown together using 2”x2”s from the fallen patio roof. The sky to the north glowed from the fires in Lancaster.

“We have running water again,” Sharon had announced after supper. “Of course, a garden hose isn’t my idea of running water, but with all the pipes busted I guess we’re lucky to have that.”

The first thing in the morning, Gary, Ron and Clarence were going to erect another frame to house a shower. Gary had a sprinkler type nozzle for his garden hose with a shutoff valve so at least they could bathe. Those sponge baths didn’t quite cut it and everyone could use a shower, even a cold shower. They practically fell into bed that

night; the three men had put in a long day. The next morning they rigged a shower using the garden hose and some more 2"x2" salvaged lumber and plastic sheeting. The water was, indeed, cold. Refreshed, they got themselves a cup of coffee and gathered at one of the tables.

"I had always thought that TEOTWAWKI would come at the hands of some terrorists or an attack on the country," Gary said, "Not after a 9 plus earthquake and some aftershocks big enough to destroy our homes."

"It's not the end of the world Gar-Bear," Ron replied.

"Ronald, I only got out of the house once a week to go shooting with you and other times to go to doctor appointments," Gary explained. "As far as I'm concerned that pile of rubble laying there was most of my world. So, as far as I'm concerned, it IS the end of my world."

"It's just a house Gary," Clarence tried to reassure his friend. "You will get your settlement and money from the government. You can rebuild."

"Oh I'm going to rebuild all right," Gary said, "Just as far from California as I can get."

"What?" Ron said. "And go where?"

"Somewhere where they don't have hurricanes and floods and earthquakes and tornados," Gary said.

"You forgot forest fires and thunderstorms and tsunamis and volcanoes," Clarence laughed. "Where are you going? Mars?"

"If I have too, yes," Gary laughed.

"I hear they have some terrible winds on Mars Gar-Bear," Ron laughed, "Better scratch that too."

"You're making fun of me," Gary finally protested, "I'm serious here."

"You can run Gar-Bear," Ron solemnly announced, "But you can't hide."

"Not to change the subject," Clarence said, "But how long do you fellas think that it will take the CEA to process our insurance claims?"

"Actually, the CEA doesn't process the claims Clarence," Ron explained. "The claims are processed by your regular insurance carrier. I assume that they will have to establish the amount of your loss and all the other usual rigmarole. Say a couple of months at the earliest."

“And we’ve been here what, 9 days?” Gary tried to calculate.

“Nine days partner. Seems like a lifetime doesn’t it?” Ron acknowledged.

“That it does,” Clarence and Gary chorused.

“Let’s get back to what I was talking about,” Gary insisted. “I know you two yard birds think I’m crazy, but I don’t care. There is a place where you don’t have to worry about hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tornados, tsunamis and volcanoes. The risk of forest fires is minimal and there is nowhere on earth that I know of that doesn’t have thunderstorms.”

“Let me guess,” Ron laughed, “You’re talking about your wild fantasy of moving to Holbrook, Arizona. Right?”

“Actually, Sharon would prefer to move to Nevada,” Gary said, “But 80% of the land in Nevada is owned by the government. So yes, somewhere in Arizona.”

“Man, that would be like moving out of the frying pan into the fire,” Ron said.

“What do you mean?” Gary asked.

“Gary, it gets hot in Arizona,” Ron said, “One hell of a lot hotter than it gets here in Palmdale.”

“Sure, if you go to Tucson or Phoenix,” Gary said, “That’s why I picked Holbrook or someplace like that. Holbrook is almost a mile high, just like Denver.”

“I’ve been through there every time we went to visit Robert or the kids in Arkansas,” Ron said. “There isn’t anything in Holbrook but desert.”

“Exactly my point,” Gary retorted. “We all live in the desert because we like it right? Well, Holbrook is the desert with seasons.”

The three of them sat there the rest of the day debating whether to rebuild or to move and if they moved, where they would move. By the end of the day, Gary had succeeded in getting Ron and Clarence to agree to a trip to Holbrook just to look around. They each talked to their wives that night and everyone agreed that if John and Kevin would keep an eye on the camp they would make the 1½ day trip to Holbrook to look around. The levels of enthusiasm varied from ecstatic (Gary) to genuine disinterest (Lucy).

Holbrook was everything that Gary said it was and everything that Ron said it was. It was a small community dominated by a railroad hub and the Cholla power plant southwest of town. They found residential lots from 1-5 acres each (or more), located just off the I-40 freeway, 7 miles East of Holbrook in the community of Sun Valley, Arizona.

Priced at approximately \$4,575 per acre, the property was just what Gary had been looking for. Water, power and telephone service existed on the property, though water mains were needed for some lots. Septic tanks needed to be installed for sewage. They could buy five acres for only \$22,875 and a double wide on a basement at another \$90,000. They could do it for about \$113 thousand. Needless to say, Gary was already to move, just as soon as the settlement came in from the earthquake insurance.

The big one had come and conquered. Lives were lost and many more irreparably altered. But, they had survived and that in and of itself had been a miracle. Survival, you see, isn't always about BOB's, MBR's and how much food you have stored. Fate can be fickle. You can be the best-prepared survivalist in the world. But, if your house falls on you, what good is being prepared? Some say that California is the land of fruits and nuts. You'd have to be nuts to live on the San Andreas Fault like I do.

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